UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.485
12 October 1993

Original: ENGLISH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 485th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 6 October 1993, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. KAMAL (Pakistan)

CONTENTS

General debate (continued)

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GE.93-02712 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. VERGNE SABOIA (Brazil) said that the most serious problems before the Executive Committee included threats to the institution of asylum, violations of the human rights of refugees, especially women and children, and the obstacles and dangers faced by UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies in trying to perform their duties. The Executive Committee should remind Governments of the need to respect the principles on which the international system of refugee protection had been built and to abide by humanitarian law relating to the safety of humanitarian agents and the right of the civilian population to obtain relief.

2. His Government was concerned about the risk of the erosion of the principles of non-refoulement, international solidarity and burden-sharing. Those pillars of the system of refugee protection were jeopardized when countries seeking to curb irregular immigration and to harmonize their asylum policies adopted laws and administrative procedures that could restrict the access of asylum-seekers to safety or even cause their refoulement. Recourse to the concept of "protection elsewhere" also posed serious problems, since it placed increased pressure on less developed countries or those not sufficiently prepared to provide protection and assistance to refugees. It could also expose refugees to refoulement. In that connection, the principle of non-refoulement was the cornerstone of asylum and of refugee protection and applied to all asylum-seekers until their status had been clearly determined. To reject refugees without granting them the opportunity of having their claims properly examined was a flagrant violation of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Executive Committee should strongly condemn violations of the principle of non-refoulement and reaffirm the need for compliance with it in all circumstances, including situations of the large-scale influx of refugees. In that case, temporary protection could be an adequate solution.

3. Discrimination and ethnic conflicts were the most common factors that gave rise to refugee situations. However, economic and social causes frequently undermined the ability of countries to face crisis situations without generating refugee flows or internal displacement. Appropriate structural solutions must therefore also be found by the international community as part of the effort to understand and deal with refugee problems.

4. At present, developing countries hosted the largest contingents of world refugees. Through international solidarity and burden-sharing, those countries should receive the resources necessary not only for providing assistance to refugees, but also for compensating for the strain placed on their infrastructure.

5. In Latin America, the Cartagena Declaration had expanded the definition of refugee and permitted flexible solutions for asylum-seekers. Brazil, for example, had recently granted asylum to a considerable number of refugees, mostly from Angola, Mozambique and Zaire. Continued UNHCR assistance was essential to enable his country to cope with that additional responsibility.

6. His delegation was pleased to note that some major refugee problems in Latin America were dwindling, as was the case in Central America and Suriname. It hoped that the political agreement reached in Haiti would be fully respected and create conditions for resolving the plight of Haitians who had fled or were trying to flee their country. The main lessons derived from the innovative process of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) were that the political and negotiated settlement of disputes was the key to solving problems relating to refugees and displaced persons and that there was an inextricable interrelationship between peace, democracy, development and durable solutions for uprooted people.

7. His delegation was concerned at the fact that the human rights of refugees were being violated in developed countries which prided themselves on their high standards of respect for human rights. Some of those countries adopted policies that hindered family reunion and constituted a denial of an essential right of refugees. His delegation was also deeply concerned about acts of violence, aggression and discrimination against refugees motivated by xenophobia and racism. Despite the efforts of Government authorities, the problem was spreading. The Executive Committee could not ignore that issue and should stress the need to combat racism and discrimination against refugees.

8. Mr. KAMARA (Observer for Sierra Leone) said that his country had long adopted a generous policy on asylum and that, during the 1960s and 1970s, some 250,000 Guineans had found asylum in Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leonean communities had absorbed them without any request for international assistance and it was only after the death of Sekou Touré in 1984, when assistance had been sought for the reintegration of Guineans returning from Sierra Leone, that UNHCR had learned that his country had provided such asylum. In the 1970s, Sierra Leone had welcomed a number of refugees, mainly from South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Sudan and Uganda, who had been accommodated in the homes of Sierra Leonean families. However, it had had a rude awakening in 1990, when 120,000 Liberian refugees had arrived in a period of only three months.

9. A few months later, incursions by Sierra Leonean rebels, sponsored by a rebel group in a neighbouring country, had brought death and destruction to the southern and eastern regions of his country. Thousands of Liberian refugees, together with many Sierra Leonean nationals, had fled as a consequence, mainly to the Republic of Guinea. As a result of the war, 4 out of 12 districts in his country had been occupied by rebels.

10. Since 1991, the rebel war had resulted in the displacement within their own country of more than 500,000 citizens in addition to the estimated 250,000 who were refugees in neighbouring countries. The enormity of the problem in Sierra Leone had not been fully grasped by the international community. As his country struggled to liberate areas held by rebels, it had to divert valuable resources to that war. At the same time, it hosted some 20,000 refugees, mainly from Liberia, in addition to those from Sudan, Ethiopia and Ghana. It should be noted that his Government's refugee policy adhered strictly to its commitment under the 1951 United Nations Convention, the 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 Convention of the Organization of African Unity.

11. One year after assuming power, his Government had not only acquitted itself well on the battlefield, but had also created conditions that would allow the rebels to lay down their arms and join in the important work of developing the country. In that connection, he expressed his country's gratitude for the assistance the international community had given to the refugees and displaced persons through UNHCR, WPF and other United Nations agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations. In recognition of the need to make the best possible use of available resources for assisting refugees and displaced persons, the Government had established the National Rehabilitation Committee (NARECOM) under the Office of the Deputy Head of State to coordinate the activities of all the agencies concerned and to avoid duplication of efforts.

12. While his delegation appreciated the assistance provided to date, it drew the international community's attention to the need for increased and continued assistance in providing relief to displaced persons and refugees and for rehabilitating areas in areas that had become liberated. In that regard, NARECOM had drawn up a comprehensive recovery programme.

13. His Government was seeking to end the war by every possible means, since, as long as the war continued, it would not be possible for the people to return to their homes and to become self-sufficient again. It therefore continued to request the international community's assistance in order to meet the desperate needs of its nationals both within and outside the country.

14. His delegation welcomed the positive developments in the situation in Liberia which could lead to the repatriation of that country's nationals who were refugees in neighbouring countries.

15. He welcomed the new observer States and drew attention to the comments the observer for the Russian Federation had made at the preceding meeting when he had underlined his country's growing needs in respect of asylum-seekers and the internally displaced. Sierra Leone supported the initiative aimed at including the Russian Federation in the membership of the Executive Committee in order to underscore the importance of its voice in that body.

16. Mr. KUBIS (Observer for Slovakia) said that, after being a producer of refugees and migrants, Slovakia had become a transit and recipient country. It had therefore joined the activities of the High Commissioner and other international institutions dealing with those problems. The establishment of the UNHCR Liaison Office in Bratislava was concrete proof of such cooperation. The Office had contributed significantly to his country's overall approach to the solution of refugee problems.

17. Another step taken to cope with those problems had been the creation of the Migration Office in September 1993 as the coordinating institution for all governmental and non-governmental organizations in that field. Legislative steps were also being taken to revise the Refugee Act of the former Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and thereby create adequate legal conditions for the stay of refugees in his country's territory.

18. The Slovak Republic had, from its very beginning, assumed responsibility for the care of refugees and displaced persons from the former Yugoslavia in its territory. It had even widened its activities to include persons who were being relocated from the Chernobyl area. Another group was expected to be resettled by the end of 1993. That programme was to continue in 1994, but its implementation in the following years would depend on his country's economic resources.

19. Despite some serious economic and financial difficulties, his country maintained an open border for all those in need of protection. In that regard, his Government had allocated 232 million crowns for such purposes in its 1993 budget.

20. In view of the lack of information on the treatment of refugees, his delegation stressed the importance of a direct connection with UNHCR databases, on the one hand, and with a regional interexchange network, on the other. Such a connection would provide his country with information that was necessary to make decisions about persons entering its territory. Furthermore, information provided by his Government could be useful to neighbouring countries and to UNHCR itself.

21. Mr. EL KHAZEN (Lebanon) said that the international community was faced with the problem of an increasing number of refugees as a result of natural disasters and armed conflicts. It was normal that the refugee problem should assume an international dimension and responsibility for meeting the needs of refugees, on the political, economic and social levels, was therefore a task for the international community.

22. The Executive Committee had frequently discussed the suffering endured by the Lebanese people as a consequence of 17 years of brutal war and the continuing occupation by Israel of its southern area. That country resorted to various violent measures, including bombardment, to force the population of the south to surrender to its will or to flee in fear and despair to other regions. Israel had recently bombed the villages of the south, forcing no fewer than 350,000 people to flee in terror. While it was true that most of them had returned to their villages, they had gone back to destroyed houses and an unstable situation.

23. He expressed his Government's appreciation to the international humanitarian organizations which had sent an emergency fact-finding mission to the south and launched an appeal to all sympathetic parties to raise approximately US$ 29 million to repair some of the consequences of the Israeli shelling. The High Commissioner had contributed US$ 100,000 to that assistance package. His delegation also thanked the countries which had, in response to the appeal by international organizations and the Lebanese Government, extended assistance to relieve the suffering in Lebanon.

24. Lebanon strongly supported the efforts being made by the High Commissioner and hoped that they would extend to the internally displaced. It had frequently called for a redefinition of the concept of refugees to include the internally displaced within the scope of the activities of the High Commissioner, since they experienced the same problems faced by refugees

as defined in the 1951 Convention. It therefore supported Commission on Human Rights resolution 1993/95 under which a representative of the Secretary-General would be mandated to deal with the problems of internally displaced persons.

25. As was known, there were a large number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and their return to their homes was a natural right. Responsibility for ensuring that return lay with the international community, which should establish an independent Palestinian State and guarantee the right to return to all Palestinians living outside the occupied territories. The Lebanese and the Palestinians categorically refused all forms of settlement in Lebanon.

26. Large numbers of persons still lived in Lebanon in a constant state of fear, poverty and instability. It was time for the international community to get to the root of the problem so that there would be no further need for relief efforts to alleviate the human plight that it created.

27. Mr. DOS SANTOS (Angola) said that the Executive Committee's last session had been held at the time of Angola's first elections, which had given the Angolan people reason to hope and have faith in a future full of promise. Despite the political maturity shown by the Angolan people during the electoral process, however, its hopes had been short-lived, since UNITA, which had not accepted its electoral defeat, had unilaterally decided to reject the results of the elections and had opted once again for armed action, causing death and destruction in various parts of the country.

28. As his delegation had stated in the Executive Committee in October 1991, more than 300,000 Angolans had expected to be repatriated, if possible, before the elections. For various reasons, that repatriation had not taken place. However, nearly 112,000 Angolans from Zaire had returned to their country spontaneously. The organized repatriation was to have begun immediately following the elections and considerable work had been done along those lines by the Government and the High Commissioner. With its own funds, the Government had carried out a repatriation operation from Zambia to the province of Moxico.

29. As a result of the situation created by UNITA, which had militarily occupied provinces that were privileged areas for the reception of repatriates, the repatriation process had been totally jeopardized. That had caused serious difficulties for the Angolan exiles who had been expecting to return to their homes. In view of the difficulties facing some of the countries of asylum where the Angolan refugees lived, particularly Zaire, the members of the Executive Committee could imagine the suffering of thousands of Angolans who had been unable to return home.

30. Despite the efforts made by the UNHCR office in Angola, repatriated Angolans had not received the support necessary for their reintegration. The staff and resources made available to them by UNHCR in transit areas, and the food and medical aid, had been greatly reduced because UNITA had endangered the World Food Programme by firing at an airplane that had been transporting goods for repatriated persons.

31. The social situation in Angola was dramatic. More than 3 million people had been either displaced or repatriated or were victims of war or drought and 25 per cent of those were children. The daily death rate was alarming - around 1,000. Only a major emergency programme supported by the international community and covering the entire country could still save lives. His Government expected that UNHCR would play a more active role to benefit repatriated people as well as displaced persons.

32. Although the repatriation of Angolan refugees had been suspended, it should not be considered finished. Everything would depend on how the political situation evolved. UNHCR should start planning now, so that, as soon as conditions were right, repatriation could resume. The wait had been long and the living conditions of Angolans in some host countries were intolerable.

33. In response to UNHCR's appeal for funds for Angola, a number of contributions had been pledged. Yet the appeal should be renewed to enable UNHCR to carry out its mission fully because funds were required for the reintegration of populations and for agriculture, health and water supply programmes. The Government did not have the financial capacity to perform those tasks alone.

34. Mr. SILAHAHI (Observer for Indonesia) said that, as a first-asylum country, Indonesia held the view that the presence of refugees and other asylum-seekers in its territory should be temporary and that resettlement to third countries and repatriation to the country of origin were the only viable solutions. No residual cases should be left in countries of first asylum. In Indonesia, a total of 144,900 Vietnamese asylum-seekers had been registered and temporarily settled over the past 18 years. Of that number, and thanks to the international community's commitment to refugees, 129,873 had been resettled to third countries, 3,767 had returned safely to their country of origin under a successful voluntary repatriation programme and 11,260 remained in Indonesia.

35. With UNHCR's assistance and in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees (CPA), the Government of Indonesia had recently completed the screening of the remaining asylum-seekers. Of the total, 2,534 had been admitted as refugees.

36. Since its launching, the CPA had scored more and more successes. Fruitful tripartite talks involving UNHCR and the Governments of Indonesia and Viet Nam had taken place in Hanoi on 1 and 2 October 1993. A memorandum of understanding on principles and arrangements relating to the return from Indonesia of Vietnamese non-refugees had been concluded.

37. Protecting the right of first asylum and safeguarding the integrity of the CPA constituted objectives shared by Indonesia. He appealed to resettlement and donor countries to demonstrate their continued commitment to the full implementation of the CPA. Full coordination between asylum and resettlement countries, UNHCR and other interested agencies was essential to the success of the CPA.

38. Mr. NOVAK (Observer for the Czech Republic) said that his country now had three years' experience in dealing with refugees. Both the former Czechoslovakia and the new Czech Republic had had to create policies and mechanisms for dealing with refugees and the necessary legislative framework within a very short period of time. The Czech Republic had acceded de jure to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol on 1 January 1993. It had adopted the decree of the former Czechoslovakia offering temporary refuge to the victims of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, including assistance for detainees, children, women and people who were ill. The Czech authorities were now preparing a partial amendment to the country's refugee law and a new global asylum law which could be adopted in 1994.

39. His Government cooperated closely with UNHCR and other international organizations such as IOM and ICRC, non-governmental organizations and refugee offices in other countries. It considered the most important tasks for the near future to be the creation of a model of asylum procedures compatible with systems in Western European countries and the preparation of a comprehensive integration programme for refugees and temporary refugees from the former Yugoslavia.

40. The Czech Republic's geographical position created a very special migration situation. The transit of persons who depended on the clandestine labour market in Western European countries was the most important migration problem. Current restrictive alterations in the asylum law of traditional asylum countries were likely to change the Czech Republic into a destination country.

41. The solution of the global refugee problem required the adoption of comprehensive international measures. The international community must concentrate on dealing with the human rights violations that were at the root of the refugee problem. The Czech Republic was prepared to take part in that effort, despite its limited experience; collaboration with other countries and international organizations in that area was very important for his country. The Executive Committee should, in that connection, take up Amnesty International's recommendations concerning refugee protection.

42. Lastly, he announced that the Czech Government would decide by the end of October 1993 on the amount of its financial contributions for victims of the armed conflict in the former Yugoslavia and for direct humanitarian assistance.

43. Mr. DOBREV (Observer for Bulgaria) noted that Bulgaria had acceded to both the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol on 12 May 1993. UNHCR had opened a Liaison Office in Sofia in February 1992. A host country agreement had been signed in May 1993. In November 1992, the National Bureau for Territorial Asylum and Refugees had been established as a Government agency to implement the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. Under its statute, the Bureau was furnishing the necessary inter-agency coordination.

44. A total of 185 persons from the former Yugoslavia had been given temporary protection and assistance. They had all been granted refugee status by the UNHCR Liaison Office. According to estimates made by the Bulgarian authorities, over 1,000 persons from the former Yugoslavia had been

accommodated with host families without having registered formally. More than 15,000 foreigners were residing illegally in Bulgaria with a view to seeking asylum in the West. With the tightening up of immigration procedures in the European Community, the majority of those foreigners had become potential asylum-seekers in Bulgaria.

45. Although the number of refugees to whom temporary protection had been accorded in Bulgaria might seem relatively small, such measures already represented a burden, owing to serious economic constraints resulting from the painful transition to a market economy and economic losses incurred because of economic sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro. That was why his country relied on increased financial assistance under UNHCR programmes to meet care and maintenance expenses. Setting up the necessary organizational structure for examining cases of asylum-seekers and potential refugees was of crucial importance for effective national policies. UNHCR assistance, particularly in training the staff of the National Bureau and in organizing seminars and courses for the police and the judiciary, would be very timely and appropriate.

46. Referring to the document giving an overview of UNHCR activities for 1992-1993 (A/AC.96/813), he said that strategic planning was of utmost importance for adequate reactions in emergency refugee situations. Objective and accurate information on the situation in potential countries of origin was a precondition for appropriate planning of national refugee policies. Bulgaria shared the view expressed in paragraph 28 of the overview concerning the important role played by the UNHCR Information and Documentation Centre in the elaboration of UNHCR programmes. His Government wished to apply formally for access to UNHCR databases, particularly to those containing information on countries of origin. As a first step, access could be given to the Bulgarian Permanent Mission in Geneva.

47. His delegation had taken note with appreciation of the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/815), which contained a very good analysis of current trends in the international protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. Some countries were applying the concepts of first country of asylum and safe country of origin in a manner that caused his Government great concern and the introduction of summary procedures for persons from "safe countries of origin" was especially alarming. His delegation endorsed the conclusion contained in paragraph 23 of the Note that such concepts could not be applied unless due regard was paid to strict observance of the principle of non-refoulement. The problem was one of the utmost importance for Bulgaria, a major transit country for refugees from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

48. His country subscribed to the prevailing feeling at the current session of the Executive Committee that priority should be given to prevention of refugee flows. All crises involving massive displacements of persons had the common denominator of mass violations of human rights. That was why Bulgaria supported recommendation No. 3 made by the Secretary-General in document A/AC.51/1993/2 and aimed at encouraging further cooperation between UNHCR and the Centre for Human Rights in cases of prolonged exodus and exile owing to violations of human rights.

49. Mr. GOONETILLEKE (Observer for Sri Lanka) said there had never been such a crucial era as the present one as far as refugees were concerned. The number of victims of both man-made and natural disasters was constantly increasing and no area of the world was spared. The refugee issue had thus taken on an international character. As to the causes of both external and internal displacement, the general tendency was to assign the blame to human rights violations, persecution, civil war and other factors. They certainly did contribute to the phenomenon, but other factors such as natural and man-made disasters, under development and the absence of peace and security did so as well. If a person did not feel secure in his usual place of residence, he would move to a more secure one. If a person could not sustain himself in his own environment, he would move to a better one. Unless the root causes of that phenomenon were addressed, the intensive rate of population movement would continue unabated.

50. In Sri Lanka's experience, there were three categories of victims: those who had left Sri Lanka for the West in pursuit of asylum; those displaced from the country's northern and eastern provinces to India; and those displaced from those provinces to the rest of Sri Lanka.

51. Following the unfortunate events of 1983, a wave of sympathy had been generated for those in the first category and asylum had been given lavishly by Western European and certain other Governments. Their willingness to accept with open arms those who had been genuinely affected by the events of 1983 had been exploited by others who, having left Sri Lanka through legitimate channels, had claimed asylum on arriving at their destinations on account of alleged persecution. In such instances economic necessity had replaced humanitarian considerations. Large sums of money ha' been paid to experts in moving human cargo across borders into preferred destinations in the West. It was heartening to note that some Western Governments had rightly assessed the prevailing situation and had taken steps to curb the influx of economic migrants.

52. With regard to the second category of refugees from his country, he said the rein of terror unleashed against their own community by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had resulted in mass movements of both internal and external refugees. The lack of international accountability for LTTE's terrorist acts gave it encouragement to continue its atrocities. Yet the improvement of the climate of security in the eastern province and part of the northern province of his country had made it possible to repatriate some refugees, with the assistance of UNHCR and the Government of India, which his delegation wholeheartedly welcomed. So far, nearly 37,000 persons had been voluntarily repatriated.

53. In order to facilitate that process, his Government had mounted a massive rehabilitation programme. Returnees were free to resettle in the areas they had originally inhabited, in other areas of their choice or to remain in welfare centres until they had decided where to go. They were paid both regular rations and resettlement allowances and financial assistance was provided for the reconstruction of their houses, the resumption of business activities, etc. Those who had left their jobs behind were reinstated with

the least possible delay. There was no question of compulsion in either repatriation or resettlement and his Government would work with UNHCR and other international organizations in those endeavours.

54. Internally displaced persons numbered over 600,000 at present, owing to the continuing conflict between LTTE and the Government. LTTE was attempting to achieve "ethn c cleansing" of the eastern and northern provinces with the intention of claiming them as "traditional homelands" of the Tamil people. Ironically, increasing numbers of Tamils themselves had fallen victim to extortion, conscription, illegal detention, trial by kangaroo courts and other repressive measures. His Government had been spending over US$ 5 million a month to feed and maintain the internally displaced persons. The sympathy and support received from UNHCR, ICRC, non-governmental organizations and many Governments was very welcome.

55. Referring to the comments made by the High Commissioner concerning prevention and protection, his Government agreed that prevention was cost-effective in the long term, but cost-intensive in the short term. Yet given the long-term benefits of prevention, the choice was obvious. The establishment of open relief camps in the northern province, achieved with the cooperation of UNHCR, had been a unique experience. For the first time, civilians who had had reason to believe their security was threatened had been able to go to an open relief camp, instead of leaving Sri Lanka for India.

56. UNHCR had played another unique role in his country. Since rail and road transportation to the Jaffna Peninsula had become impossible as a result of fighting and sabotage, the good offices of UNHCR had been employed to open up safe passage permitting civilians to move in and out of the Peninsula. After several rounds of discussion between UNHCR and LTTE, a draft agreement on safe passage had been handed to LTTE in June 1993. Although several attempts had been made to finalize those arrangements, that humanitarian goal remained a distant dream because of LTTE's intransigent attitude.

57. In conclusion, he thanked the High Commissioner and her able and dedicated staff, as well as the donor nations that had made it possible for UNHCR to carry out its mission in Sri Lanka. With the country's security situation now returning to normal, it was to be hoped that UNHCR would have a growing role to play in repatriating and resettling Sri Lankan returnees in the months to come.

58. Mr. CHAKRAVARTI (Observer for India) expressed his Government's deep gratitude for the sympathy and solidarity shown with the victims of the recent earthquake in India. The sentiments expressed at the current session of the Executive Committee strengthened the Indian authorities in their efforts to cope with the tragedy.

59. India attached great importance to the humanitarian work of the High Commissioner and her Office. The nature of that work demanded that the Executive Committee and the secretariat should be apolitical and above any suspicion of political motivation. The Executive Committee and its Bureau had a heavy responsibility in that regard.

60. There were now over 18 million refugees throughout the world. Refugee flows often stemmed from situations where people could not fully enjoy their political and civil rights. Yet the root causes of population flows had become increasingly complex. As the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/815) pointed out, refugee flows should not be seen only in terms of violations of civil and political rights: extreme poverty, hunger and economic disruption had become significant causes as well. If disparities of wealth among industrialized and developing countries persisted, people would continue to leave their countries of origin.

61. The Note on International Protection discussed circumstances in which UNHCR might accept specific responsibility for internally displaced persons. It must be recognized that the primary responsibility for the welfare of citizens within its territory lay with the State and the consent of the State should be a prerequisite for any activity relating to internally displaced persons. The approach taken should follow the terms of the United Nations Charter, even where responsible national mechanisms no longer existed. Stretching UNHCR's mandate to deal with internally displaced persons on a permanent or near-permanent basis was something that should be viewed with circumspection.

62. The international community was becoming aware of the impact of terrorism and subversion on refugee flows. All States had the responsibility to desist from sponsoring or supporting terrorist and subversive activities in other countries that could lead to refugee flows. Terrorism had been condemned as a violation of human rights at the recent United Nations Conference on Human Rights.

63. It was gratifying to note that, since the forty-third session of the Executive Committee, a large number of voluntary repatriation movements had taken place or begun. Voluntary repatriation remained the preferred durable solution for refugee problems and was a practical technique for achieving the safe and dignified return of refugees.

64. Despite being a developing country with limited resources, India had a long-standing tradition of hospitality towards refugees. Over the years, it had received refugees from throughout its region and had borne that burden stoically, primarily using its own resources. Repatriation had been carried out on a strictly voluntary basis, essentially through bilateral arrangements. India now harboured thousands of refugees from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh who wished to return home. Agreements had been reached with the Governments of those countries for voluntary repatriation. In the case of Sri Lankan refugees, the repatriation process was already proceeding smoothly with the cooperation of the Government and UNHCR.

65. Mr. AKTAN (Turkey) said that, as a country situated at the very centre of a region where refugee-generating conflicts were taking place and having historical and cultural ties with most of the peoples affected, Turkey was greatly concerned with the problem of prevention. The first questions that arose were what to prevent and how to set about doing so. A systemic or holistic approach, rather than the analytical one usually adopted in the modern world, was called for when attempting to assess the refugee problem. The High Commissioner had appeared to feel the same need when she had

advocated a comprehensive strategy; the United Nations pursued the same objective when it stressed the coordinating role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in complex emergencies. A thorough debate on the problem was called for if an international consensus was to be achieved.

66. Although the international community had been aware for decades that the population explosion was bound to cause grave harm to the environment and that the situation, especially in the least developed countries, would be exacerbated by slowdowns in economic growth, it had failed to prevent the situation from occurring. Today, it could hardly hope to solve the resulting refugee problems by re-establishing order or restoring development in the countries of origin before the refugees' repatriation, but had to be content with encouraging voluntary repatriation and hoping that the refugees would remain in their countries once they had returned there.

67. While it was true that democratic countries did not create refugees or displaced persons in times of peace, he doubted whether that was so exclusively because they recognized human rights and freedoms. History showed that most democratic countries had achieved their territorial integrity and political unity through a blend of persuasion and force. Their high level of development produced a wealth of goods sufficient either to meet or to curb the demands of ethnic groups which themselves were largely assimilated in homogenized cultures. Yet even democratic countries were not altogether free from problems.

68. The refugee problems created by totalitarian regimes had not been of unmanageable proportions. Refugees were the product of disintegrating States or, paradoxical as that might seem, of countries in the process of democratization: the former through loss of political authority, the latter through loss of an all-embracing ideology. In addition to endangering the precarious process of economic reform excessively rapid democratization could encourage virulent ethno-nationalism, which, short of equally vicious repression, was bound to create refugee flows. That dilemma of disintegrating empires was one with which his country was all too familiar.

69. It had to be recognized that democracy was not a guarantee for the promotion of ethnic rights in the short run, but, rather, a political and legal framework within which ethnic groups could strive to promote their rights, provided that they remained within legitimate bounds - a long and difficult political struggle which, if peacefully pursued, stood some chance of leading towards a balanced and civilized outcome. To believe that transplanting democracy and respect for human rights would necessarily and immediately eliminate the root causes of refugee flows was both idealistic and simplistic.

70. Among the causes of the refugee problem, no mention was ever made of the implications of the foreign policies of developed countries or of their societies' attitudes towards ethnic problems in the rest of the world. In many developed democratic societies, there was an undeniable bias in favour of the collective rights of ethnic groups in other countries. That was particularly true of the attitude of non-governmental organizations, whose sense of identity with ethnic groups outside their own countries sometimes went so far as to lead them to support ethnic terrorism. Yet the same

non-governmental organizations were sometimes prone to overlook the situation of ethnic groups in their own countries such as foreigners, asylum seekers or migrant workers exposed to racist violence. It was difficult to avoid the impression that such attitudes, rather than representing the conscience of the societies in question, let alone mankind as a whole, served purely therapeutic ends. Nevertheless, non-governmental organizations exercised a strong influence over the media which shaped public opinion and, in that way, contributed to the shaping of foreign policy.

71. Of course, foreign policy was not simply a matter of transforming popular sympathies or dislikes into attainable objectives; it had its own aims which had little to do with morality. Gaining a competitive political and economic edge in a predatory international environment sometimes called for destabilizing the competitors by exploiting their ethnic differences. Under such circumstances, democracy and respect for human rights appeared irrelevant and an explosive potential for refugee creation was considered to be of secondary importance.

72. According to a theory which had recently gained currency in the international media, the West was the Empire, while all other States were barbarians. A second theory divided the world into a zone of peace and a zone of turmoil; according to a third, the clash of civilizations was imminent and inescapable.

73. Under the first theory, Turkey, located as it was in the intermediary region between the Empire and the barbarians, had the mission of blocking the migratory movements of the new barbarians towards the Empire. The third theory saw Turkey as being torn between its Muslim religion and its Western vocation and thus caught up in the clash of the two irreconcilable civilizations. While he was inclined to consider all three theories to be mere fantasies, he wished to make it clear that Turkey should not be counted on to provide a barrier to marching barbarians, whoever they might be.

74. Turning to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and having paid a tribute to the staff of UNHCR and ICRC and members of non-governmental organizations working there and thanked the European Community and other donors for their generous contributions, he said that the main lesson of the tragedy was that peace-keeping could not be carried out in tandem with an ongoing war. To provide food and relief, but not protection, to those who were targets of war was in itself a blatant contradiction. In Bosnia as well as in the Caucasus region, refugees were not a by-product of the conflict, but its main aim. Every resolution of the international community that was left unheeded and was not enforced cost UNHCR money.

75. Many other potential areas of ethnic conflict with far larger populations than Bosnia and Herzegovina were likely to generate wars that would also aim at ethnic cleansing. Unless the international community was determined to stop the aggression and enforce peace, UNHCR's presence would not suffice to prevent those situations from getting out of control. The international community, had, however, lost all its credibility in Bosnia by giving the green light to forces which wanted to dump their undesirable ethnic elements on the international community as refugees. Under those circumstances, it was safe to guess that UNHCR's growth would continue to be exponential.

76. What was needed was not only a comprehensive strategy geared to a culture of cooperation, but foreign policy consensus on an intergovernmental strategy based on sanity more than on compassion. The international community had to do some soul searching before it lost its soul for good.

77. Mr. AZAM (Observer for Afghanistan) said that, as a result of the 14-year war of independence, 6 million Afghans had been compelled to leave their homes and take refuge in Pakistan, Iran and elsewhere, while some 4 million had been internally displaced. About 1.5 million persons had died and some 2 million disabled persons, as well as millions of widows and orphans, remained in the war-torn country. Eighty per cent of the country's physical infrastructure had been destroyed and some 15 million mines of different types had still not been defused. Moreover, tens of thousands of Afghan children, taken away for the purpose of Russification during the war, still had not returned from Russia and other Republics of the former USSR. Even more painful was the fact that most Afghan children today were growing up without education.

78. The two factors involved in making so many Afghans seek refuge outside the country could be described as "push" and "pull". The Russian invasion of Afghanistan, fear of death and imprisonment, compulsory drafting into military service, war and bombardments, the torture and killing of people for their religious and political beliefs and the destruction of socio-economic infrastructures had provided the "push"; the promise of peace, health, education, work, family life, etc. in neighbouring countries had been the "pull".

79. Today, it was essential to create a "pull" factor to encourage refugees to return home. Their houses were ruined, a safe water supply was lacking, the irrigation system had been destroyed, improved plant seeds were not available, homes and farms were riddled with mines and the land could no longer be cultivated by traditional methods using oxen. Sentiments and emotions alone were not enough to convince the refugees to return unless they had the minimum means of survival, at least for a season. In several instances, as, for example, in the Kama district of Nangarhar Province, refugees who had returned to Afghanistan had gone back to Pakistan after only a few weeks because of the lack of minimum living requirements.

80. Appeals to individuals and organizations had met with a contradictory response. Some said they could not help because there was no peace in Afghanistan; others explained that, under the present circumstances, assistance was related to security. Yet the more refugees returned to the country, the sooner security would prevail there.

81. At present, more than one third of Afghanistan's population lived abroad. The younger men had played an active role in the resistance against foreign aggression. But today there was no more need for military action. Families should return to their country and throw themselves into the rehabilitation of agriculture. Once the young men knew that their parents needed their help on the land, they would throw away their weapons, return home and share in their families' efforts. Conversely, if the families continued to live in camps in Pakistan or Iran, the young men would continue to carry weapons and damage security. In other words, the restoration of peace was directly related to the rate of repatriation of refugees.

82. His Government had decided to transfer power to the nation. But how could that be done when one third of the population lived abroad, while those that remained were being unnecessarily harassed by armed forces? Nothing but effective and urgent steps towards the repatriation and reintegration of refugees would bring security and a democratic process to Afghanistan. The problem of refugee influxes from Tajikistan placed an additional burden on the country. His Government needed help in the search for solutions whereby those refugees could be restored to their homes as soon as possible. In that connection, he welcomed the High Commissioner's visit to the region as well as the Tripartite Agreements between UNHCR, Afghanistan and Iran and Pakistan, respectively.

83. In conclusion, he said that the fact that Afghan refugees accounted for the largest share of the world's refugee population, as well as the fact that there were large numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees from Tajikistan, suggested that Afghanistan ought to be a full member of the Executive Committee. Since UNHCR had helped Afghanistan in the past and would continue to do so, he formally appealed for full membership in the Committee in order to facilitate that work.

84. Mr. FAROOQ (Observer for Bangladesh) said that, since the Executive Committee's preceding session, positive developments had taken place towards reducing the tensions and uncertainties arising from the massive influx of refugees from Myanmar into his country. In early 1992, when the number of refugees had peaked at over 260,000, his Government had been faced with a situation that not only severely strained its limited economic and administrative capacity to host so many refugees, but also placed it under domestic political pressure to arrange for the early repatriation of the refugees to Myanmar. Generous and sympathetic international response to the refugee crisis, including the prompt and effective involvement of UNHCR at his Government's request in meeting the needs of the refugees while they had been in Bangladesh, had been of great assistance, for which his Government expressed its sincere thanks.

85. From the beginning of the repatriation process in September 1992, his country had been committed to the voluntary repatriation of the Myanmar refugees in its territory. So far, 37,000 persons had returned to their original places of residence. A Memorandum of Understanding between Bangladesh and UNHCR detailing the modalities of the voluntary repatriation process had been signed in May 1993. His Government, which had always advocated UNHCR's role and presence in the country of origin as an important confidence-building factor which would facilitate the repatriation of Myanmar nationals, was therefore particularly happy to learn that, following the High Commissioner's recent private visit to Myanmar, a Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and Myanmar was expected to be signed in the immediate future, allowing for a UNHCR presence in the Rakhine State of Myanmar from which the vast majority of the refugees originated. The High Commissioner's patience, understanding, personal initiative and commitment to a durable solution of the refugee situation in the region had his Government's unreserved and sincere appreciation.

86. The importance his Government attached to the early repatriation of the refugees to their home country could not be overemphasized. Notwithstanding the hospitality of its people, the fragile economy of Bangladesh did not permit it to host such large numbers of refugees indefinitely. Damage to forests and the environment generally caused by the refugees' prolonged stay had been of a very high order. The recovery would take a long time, since Bangladesh was one of the world's most densely populated countries where refugee camps and ordinary villages were practically part of one another. Furthermore, the continuing presence of refugees created a situation in which conflicts between refugees and local inhabitants could not be ruled out. His Government therefore wished to encourage the High Commissioner expeditiously to conclude the Memorandum of Understanding with Myanmar and to plan for the quick repatriation of the remaining 212,000 refugees still in Bangladesh. In conclusion, he reiterated his Government's appreciation of the generous and continued response and support of the international community in helping it to bear the enormous cost of hosting a quarter of a million refugees. It also wished to commend the High Commissioner and her colleagues for their cooperation in caring for the refugees from Myanmar.

87. Mr. BALOI (Observer for Mozambique) said that the past year had seen the development of a new relationship between his country and UNHCR, evidenced, in particular, by visits by the former Deputy High Commissioner and by the Chairman of the forty-third session of the Executive Committee. Field trips from the UNHCR headquarters in Geneva to Mozambique and to countries hosting Mozambican refugees had become more frequent and measures had been taken to strengthen the UNHCR office and branches in Mozambique.

88. At the Executive Committee's forty-third session, his delegation had officially announced the signing of a peace agreement between the Mozambican Government and RENAMO. Since then, great efforts had been made to consolidate peace and reconciliation among Mozambicans. Two important elements were, however, still missing: the approval of the electoral law, on the one hand, and the demobilization of the military on both sides, followed by the formation of a new army, on the other. Nevertheless, the peace was holding and reconstruction and rehabilitation activities were proceeding. He reiterated his Government's commitment to the implementation of the peace agreement and to the need to pave the way towards the holding of fair and free multiparty elections by October 1994, which, in turn, would lead to lasting peace and stability.

89. Details concerning the repatriation of Mozambican refugees had already been supplied by previous speakers from host countries and were contained in documents circulated to the Executive Committee. There was also no doubt that the signing of the basic agreement between UNHCR and South Africa and the forthcoming tripartite agreement to be signed by UNHCR, South Africa and Mozambique would finally allow Mozambican refugees to be recognized as such and therefore to enjoy the possibility of returning home in safety and dignity.

90. With regard to the question of organized repatriation as against spontaneous repatriation, for the past three years, his Government had been asking without success for support in dealing with spontaneous returns taking place during the war. Failure to obtain such support meant that, today, when

the volume of spontaneous returns was increasing and pressure was being brought to bear on it by refugees wanting to be repatriated at once, his Government was still deciding where, when and how to create minimum conditions for the repatriation of refugees. Although some of those refugees were already living in Mozambique, they still depended on the host countries for much of what ought to have been provided in the places of origin or of choice. The only way to enable such returnees to resume their normal life was to accelerate repatriation-related activities.

91. In addition to other vulnerable population groups, Mozambique had to cope with refugees, internally displaced persons and demobilized soldiers. In the case of the first and last-mentioned categories, the organization from which assistance could be sought was readily identifiable. In the case of internally displaced persons, however, there was no specific United Nations body in charge and he therefore shared the concern expressed by some previous speakers about the need to find a solution to the problem. Lastly, he expressed the hope that the generous attitude which UNHCR, non-governmental organizations and the international community at large had shown towards Mozambican refugees would be extended to other countries in need and, in particular, to Angola.

92. Mr. TIRONI (Observer for Chile), after expressing his appreciation of the work done by the High Commissioner and her staff, some members of which had lost their lives in their noble undertaking, said that the problem of displaced persons had taken on alarming proportions. The figures for refugees and internally displaced persons showed that the restructuring of political balances in the global system had not been sufficient to inhibit the factors which caused such massive population flows. UNHCR had put forward a strategy for innovatory and durable solutions which included the capacity to respond in cases of emergency, preventive action, and voluntary repatriation. An analysis of the observations contained in the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/815) revealed that refugee-related problems entailed potential risks that compromised international solidarity and made protection precarious.

93. Historical experience and many current cases showed the growing interdependence between peacekeeping, the promotion of economic and social development, and humanitarian action. The approach indicated in the Secretary-General's report entitled "Agenda for Peace" had initiated a process from which UNHCR could not stand aloof. As the High Commissioner had pointed out, UNHCR could not dissociate itself from United Nations political initiatives to help to solve the refugee problem. Nevertheless, UNHCR's involvement must be restricted to humanitarian needs, since the non-political nature of humanitarian activities must be preserved.

94. His delegation valued the promotion of models which offered integral solutions and incorporated development assistance programmes, migration, the consolidation of democracy and the full enjoyment of human rights. Interdependent action in those four areas would promote confidence and durable solutions. The procedure followed by the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) constituted an integral response involving the joint handling of the problem of uprooting, the consolidation of peace and the development of the countries concerned. A definite political will had been required to tackle the problems of various population groups through a

technical approach inspired by the Cartagena Declaration. That model was a valuable precedent at the regional and inter-agency level that should be borne in mind by the Economic and Social Council committee responsible for the matter. It was to be hoped that the post-CIREFCA stage, in which UNDP would play an important role, would make it possible to consolidate peace through human development.

95. Massive population movements were beginning to shape one of the most complex situations that would have to be faced in the next century. The determining factors included economic and social motivations and crises in ethnic relations. Failure to observe human rights and situations of generalized violence had led to an abuse of the right of asylum in the light of the rules of international law. Protective formulas for resolving such delicate situations, even temporarily, had to be compatible with the right to asylum non-refoulement and non-discrimination. There could be no doubt that asylum was in crisis in countries which had traditionally pursued an open policy in the matter. The increase in asylum-seekers whose circumstances did not conform stricto jure to those set forth in the 1951 Convention was a preoccupying problem that could lead to a distortion of the institution of asylum and to a weakening of the right to it. In that connection, account had to be taken not only of unfounded applications for asylum, but also of interceptions, rejection at frontiers and other restrictive administrative practices. Consequently, solutions had to be found which did not impair the integrity of the right to asylum and took account of the need to minimize its abuse. Paragraphs 8 and 9 of the draft report of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection (A/AC.96/819) reflected the need to seek balanced solutions.

96. Historically, the countries of Latin America had been active in producing refugees and in accepting them. That was one of the region's contributions to the development of international law and that vocation had recently been renewed at a meeting of experts in Uruguay, sponsored by UNHCR, for the purpose of promoting the right to asylum. Consideration had been given to the limitations, application and abuse of the right. A set of recommendations had been drawn up to strengthen the rules of the 1951 Convention, the 1967 Protocol and the Cartagena Declaration by incorporating them in domestic legislation. Latin American experts thus continued to consider that the extended definition contained in the Cartagena Declaration constituted a contribution to the refugee concept. His Government hoped that the idea would be adequately followed up on the tenth anniversary of the Declaration.

97. The situation of internally displaced persons, which was technically close to that of refugees, had assumed alarming proportions. In the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/815), the High Commissioner formulated guidelines for UNHCR's intervention in such cases. There was a tendency to allow UNHCR a greater level of commitment in the matter. It was also clear that there were mandatory limitations on its capacity to act through the Secretary-General. It, nevertheless, seemed desirable to consider the observations made by the delegation of Sweden in connection with the primary responsibility of the affected States and of the United Nations and the suggestion made at the 1993 session of the Commission on Human Rights that there should be at least a focal point in the United Nations system for

information on displaced persons. For that purpose, UNHCR could make a study of the implications of having an office of that kind. Internal displacements required urgent action and UNHCR should work together with other agencies to initiate a process for meeting the needs of countries requesting its cooperation.

98. The contribution which countries that were not major donors could make to UNHCR's work could be described as alternative arrangements for cooperation. In that connection, it would be interesting to explore, with UNHCR's Division of Human Resources Management, arrangements that would make it possible, as part of technical cooperation among developing countries, to contribute human resources for use in emergency operations.

99. The economic imbalances separating North from South the exacerbation of nationalism and ethnic discrimination, the vulnerability of democratic models and the persistence of gross violations of human rights were factors which it would be difficult to check through restrictive asylum and migration practices. What was needed was a renewed attempt to bring about solidarity and a search for solutions which would, without weakening the principles and institutions governing asylum, offer durable solutions that were the only guarantee that social stability and global peace would be promoted.

100. Mr. BONG JOO MOON (Observer for the Republic of Korea) said that the end of the cold war had heightened expectations that a more peaceful world would soon be seen, with a more stable and enhanced quality of life. Nevertheless, a series of new challenges, in particular the unprecedented flow of refugees resulting from various conflicts, meant that it was still too early for those expectations to materialize. The explosive growth of UNHCR's budget and staff over the past few years provided evidence of the seriousness and scale of the current refugee problem.

101. His delegation paid a tribute to the courage, commitment and sacrifices made by the High Commissioner and her staff, who often had to work in difficult and dangerous circumstances. The security of humanitarian workers was becoming a serious concern for the international community and urgent measures were required to tackle the problem.

102. His delegation generally shared the views expressed by the High Commissioner in her opening statement at the 481st meeting. Obviously, the root cause of the refugee crisis was complex, but the background was the difficult political, social and economic situation in many parts of the world. A durable solution could be found only through a comprehensive approach. In that context, his Government supported the need for a coherent and comprehensive strategy to deal with the refugee problem. As the High Commissioner had rightly pointed out, that should be developed in close cooperation with the United Nations system and with humanitarian organizations, development organizations, non-governmental organizations and Governments. The High Commissioners emphasis on making the improvement of performance and accountability a priority item was most appreciated.

103. His delegation welcomed the significant progress made in resolving some of the refugee problems in Asia. The implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees (CPA) was particularly encouraging and his

delegation hoped that the meeting of the CPA Steering Committee, to be held in early 1994, would provide an opportunity to conclude the programme. Moreover, UNHCR and the Governments concerned were to be commended on the completion of the repatriation of more than 370,000 Cambodian refugees earlier in 1993; that had contributed to the holding of a successful election in that country. Also welcome was the signing, in May 1993, of a Memorandum of Understanding between the High Commissioner and the Government of Myanmar as a key to settling the refugee problem there.

104. In December 1993, his Government had acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as well as to its 1967 Protocol, thereby consolidating the legal foundation of its policy for the protection of refugees. Despite its limited resources as a developing country, the Republic of Korea had increased its 1993 contribution to UNHCR's General Programmes five-fold over its 1992 contribution and had also made a modest contribution to the humanitarian assistance programme in the former Yugoslavia. He reaffirmed his Government's full and continued support for UNHCR's activities.

105. Mr. KARAMAGE (Observer for Rwanda) said that he wished to inform the Executive Committee of the steps taken by the Government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front to find a durable and final solution to the problem of Rwandese refugees. In that connection, his Government enjoyed excellent relations and was engaged in a permanent dialogue with UNHCR, as shown by UNHCR's recent supply of emergency humanitarian assistance to persons displaced by the war in Rwanda, even though such persons did not fall within its mandate. His Government was extremely grateful for that action and renewed its appeal for help in the light of the catastrophic situation of the displaced persons, of whom there were now nearly 1 million.

106. Since the outbreak of the war on 1 October 1990, his Government and the Rwandese Patriotic Front had made considerable efforts to put an end to it and to find durable and final solutions to the refugee problem. Thus, in Dar-es-Salaam in the United Republic of Tanzania on 19 February 1991, the Heads of Government of the subregion, assisted by the Secretary-General of OAU and a representative of UNHCR, had adopted the Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on the Rwandese refugee problem. His Government expressed its deep gratitude to all its partners for holding the summit, which had undoubtedly been the first concrete step in the search for a just and lasting solution for Rwandese refugees.

107. On 4 August 1993, a Peace Agreement between the Government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front had been signed in Arusha in the United Republic of Tanzania, putting an end to 34 months of war. The agreement had been welcomed by the Rwandese people as a whole, both inside and outside the country, as ushering in a new era in inter-Rwandese relations and as laying the foundations for an enlarged transitional Government which would administer the country until the holding of free elections. His Government and the Rwandese Patriotic Front were committed to respect the contents of the Agreement in full. The transitional Government would be effective as soon as the neutral international force whose establishment had been recommended by the Secretary-General of the United Nations had arrived. The Peace Agreement specified that the repatriation of Rwandese refugees represented an important aspect of peace, national unity and reconciliation. Although the Peace

Agreement provided for the right of everyone to return at any time after its signing, it indicated that collective repatriation would be possible only after a preparatory period, which could last up to nine months. In order to guarantee the harmonious return of all Rwandese who wanted to go back to their motherland, the protocol to the Agreement went further in defining a Rwandese refugee than the concept contained in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and in the 1969 OAU Convention on Refugees in Africa by recognizing as a Rwandese refugee any Rwandese who declared himself to be so, even if he was not registered with UNHCR. Along the same lines, the protocol allowed the principle of dual nationality, which for a long time had been banished from Rwandese legislation.

108. Anxious to see the Peace Agreement take effect, especially as far as Rwandese refugees were concerned, the Government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front reiterated their urgent appeal to UNHCR for the rapid conclusion of the Plan of Action for durable solutions for Rwandese refugees decided on in Dar-es-Salaam in February 1991, with a view to the holding of a donor conference that would allow the start-up of repatriation operations without further delay. Until such time as the repatriation commission could be set up by the enlarged transitional Government, the Government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front were fully available to UNHCR and OAU for joint participation in taking the necessary steps to finalize the Plan of Action. Although it would like other members of the international community to commit themselves along the same lines, the Government of Rwanda reaffirmed that Rwanda, which had always been a country of asylum for foreign refugees despite the difficult problems with which it was confronted, would continue to give very favourable consideration to any application for asylum. His Government exhorted all States, all international and non-governmental organizations and all humanitarian institutions and foundations to combine their efforts to eliminate all the causes giving rise to the refugee phenomenon.

109. Mr. FREEMAN (United Kingdom) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Belgium on behalf of the European Community and its member States and recalled that, in her opening statement, the High Commissioner had drawn attention to the continued growth of the number of refugees and displaced persons throughout the world and the consequent burden placed on UNHCR, which was being called upon to serve in conditions far more demanding than those envisaged at its creation. It was being required to act more quickly than ever before and to cope with numbers far greater than before in situations of complex emergencies and with growing numbers of internally displaced persons whose plight might be equal to or even surpass that of many refugees. It was operating increasingly in areas of conflict or in areas where Government authority had all but broken down. All that had placed unprecedented pressure on UNHCR's capacity to respond. Nevertheless, UNHCR had achieved some remarkable successes in the past 12 months. The Cambodian repatriation programme had been a fine example of what could be achieved. The introduction of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) there and in several other countries around the world had been an imaginative innovation and an important step in helping returnees to rebuild their lives.

110. It was impossible to discuss UNHCR's recent work without also referring to the former Yugoslavia, which had accounted for more than one third of its budget. UNHCR's work there had been impressive, despite the manipulation of humanitarian aid by all parties to that tragic conflict and the security risks to its personnel. Over 100 civilian staff had been seconded by the United Kingdom Government to work with UNHCR in the former Yugoslavia. He paid a tribute to them and to all the other aid personnel working there, as well as to UNPROFOR, which included a British Battalion Group which protected convoys and secured routes. Without their efforts, thousands more would have died.

111. The experiences in the former Yugoslavia and of humanitarian agencies working in other areas of conflict such as Somalia and Angola highlighted an issue of growing concern for all involved in humanitarian work - the challenge of reconciling humanitarian needs with political objectives. The two did not contradict each other. Humanitarian assistance without any attempt to address the root causes of a crisis was short-sighted, since it meant merely rescuing people from one fate to line them up for another. At the same time, however, political and military decisions should not be taken without due regard to the humanitarian situation. The two must go hand in hand, both in planning and in implementation.

112. One important aspect of concern to UNHCR was the impact of sanctions on humanitarian relief operations. Sanctions were not intended to restrict the delivery of humanitarian and essential goods. The United Kingdom again stressed its willingness to assist UNHCR and other agencies with their applications to Sanctions Committees in New York and to avoid delays wherever possible in the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance.

113. His delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's statement that UNHCR would continue to cooperate closely with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in its efforts to mobilize the United Nations system to respond rapidly and coherently to complex emergencies and to deal with the continuum from relief to development. It considered that the conclusions reached by the Economic and Social Council in July 1993 provided a good basis for the further development of such cooperation. However, improved inter-agency coordination alone could not fill all the gaps in the system. Each agency must review and adapt its own procedures to respond to changed circumstances. The High Commissioner was therefore to be congratulated on the substantial progress made in strengthening UNHCR's emergency capacity. A more flexible emergency fund, the deployment of emergency response teams and standby arrangements with external partners had all proved their worth. For its part, the United Kingdom intended to work closely with UNHCR to identify and formalize practical agreements on areas of assistance that could be provided to UNHCR in response to emergencies.

114. In 1994, for the third year running, UNHCR expected its budget to exceed US$ 1 billion. The United Kingdom remained a firm supporter of UNHCR and intended to maintain its position as a major donor. In 1993, it had so far contributed over £45 million, which did not include its contributions through European Community programmes. It would continue to contribute a sizeable sum to UNHCR's core costs, a sum which was not earmarked and was therefore available for the High Commissioner's use as needs demanded. The

United Kingdom would also continue to respond to UNHCR's Special Programmes, which, by their very nature, implied a degree of earmarking. However, that earmarking would be as "light" as it could be made. Perhaps the distinction between the budgets for General Programmes and Special Programmes was less necessary or advisable than it had been in the past. Certainly, the substantially different way in which the Executive Committee dealt with them no longer seemed to be justified.

115. As demands on resources escalated, all spending departments and their budgets came in for increasingly detailed scrutiny. Everyone was looking for the best value for money and trying to reduce waste. It was in that climate that aid budgets had to compete in today's world and in which contributions to organizations like UNHCR were examined. It was necessary to demonstrate that UNHCR was the best value for money. Another essential requirement, as budgets tightened, was for UNHCR to ensure that its work was correctly focused and its priorities clearly established. While acknowledging the valuable work which UNHCR had undertaken in the care and protection of internally displaced persons, the United Kingdom supported the careful definition of the limits of UNHCR's role given by the High Commissioner in her opening statement. UNHCR's resources were already fully stretched and a very careful study of the political, financial and other implications would be needed before any attempt was made to move beyond the criteria that the High Commissioner had proposed.

116. The 1994 General Programmes target once again showed a modest increase which his delegation could support. The target should, however, be kept under review, with occasional opportunities for reductions as situations improved, as well as the more usual proposals for increases in response to new demands. In that context, his delegation welcomed the emphasis on the redeployment of UNHCR staff from Cambodia, Nicaragua and elsewhere after the successful completion of repatriation programmes referred to by the High Commissioner in her opening statement. His delegation also appreciated her determination to improve UNHCR's programme delivery and accountability by further delegating decision-making to field offices, with a commensurate strengthening of their budget and audit functions. Overall, UNHCR, like other agencies, should demonstrate cost-effectiveness and rigorous accountability in all its activities.

117. It was comparatively easy to focus on the limitations and deficiencies of international aid. However, without humanitarian assistance of the kind delivered by UNHCR, the suffering of millions of people around the world would be immeasurably increased. His delegation paid a tribute to the leadership of the High Commissioner and to the courage and devotion of UNHCR staff all over the world. Rather than criticizing international agencies for failing to reach every victim, those agencies should be congratulated on their courage and commitment. Condemnation should be directed instead to those who violated international humanitarian law and standards or who used aid as a weapon of war, since it was their actions which caused suffering and outflows of refugees.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.